The History of the Worship of Śakti in Mithilā

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The antiquity of the Śakti-worship in Mithilā[1] goes back to remote past, but for the early period there is paucity of literary evidence and it is only on the basis of archaeological finds that we are able to show the prevalence of the Mother Cult in this region. These finds are in the shape of terracotta figurines, female figures depicted on seals and sealings, ring-stones and a gold plaque from Lauriya Nandangarh. It may here be mentioned that when most of the part of northern India had come into Brahmanical fold Mithilā, perhaps, remained outside. It was possibly because Mithilā was predominantly inhabited by the non-Aryan people and their culture and beliefs naturally dominated the area. It was probably due to this reason that though Mithilā was situated in the Madhyadeśa it was excluded from the four traditional division of India. However, the earliest reference to Mithilā can be found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa[2] where river Sadānīrā is mentioned as dividing

1 Mithilā includes the modern districts of Hajipur, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Champaran, Begusarai, Saharsa, Purnea and Nepal Terai (Rautāhat, Saralāhī, Saptarī, Mahatarī and Morang (Misra, J.K. : History of Maithili Literature, vol. I, p. 1); as according to the Bṛhad Viṣṇupurāṇa it is surrounded by the Kauśikī river on the east, by Gaṇḍakī on the west, by the Gaṅgā on the south and the Himālaya on the north (Misra, J.K., op.cit., p. 1). Though the above mentioned description fixes the southern limits of Mithilā to the northern bank of the Ganges it would not be wrong to say that Mithilā-culture also crossed the limits of Gaṅgā and spread in the region situated close to her southern bank, as we find northern Monghyr and Bhagalpur influenced by Maithila culture. Hence while discussing any aspect of Mithilā's culture we must take into consideration these areas also. In Monghyr and Bhagalpur the spoken language is a dialect of Maithili.

2 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, I. 4. 1.

Videha[3] and Kośala. Mithilā is also mentioned in the Upaniṣads and the great sage Yājñyavalkya belonged to Mithilā. Still none of the literary sources throw light on the religious condition of the region. However, we can safely presume that due to the predominance of the non-Aryan elements in this area, there was prevalence of the worship of Mother Goddess in Mithilā.[4] In the ancient period the worship of Mother Goddess was widely prevalent not only in India but even outside. The Bronze Age civilization throughout the world definitely witnessed the worship of Mother Goddess.[5]

The earliest archaeological evidence of the worship of Mother Goddess in Mithilā is a gold plaque belonging to the 8th century B. C. discovered from Lauriya Nandangarh, on which a female figure is depicted standing frontal and is absolutely nude with sex-organ clearly indicated. Bloch has identified this figure as Pṛthivī.[6] A similar gold plaque has been discovered from Syria belonging to the 13th century B. C. bearing the figure of goddess Astarte.[7] A. B. Keith[8] does not agree with this identification. A. K. Coomaraswamy,[9] though admits that proper evidence for such an identification is lacking but he agrees with such a possibility. In spite of the paucity of evidence the identification of the figure with mother goddess should not be doubted. She may be Pṛthivī or a Syrian prototype but she certainly represents a deity.[10]

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3 It appears that the old name of Mithilā was Videha which included Mithilā and Videha (Miśra, J. K., op. cit., p. 3).

4 The social and religious organization of the Vedic Aryans was based upon the principle of 'father right', whereas the representative communities of brown race was based upon the principle of 'mother right'. (Mackenzie : Indian Myth and Legend, p. xxx). Mackenzie, further, observes that the communities of brown race were worshippers of Mother cult, they held their belief in the shape of folk religion (op. cit., p. L).

5 Marshall, J : Mohenjodaro and Indus Civilization, vol. I, p. 50.

6 ASI-AR. 1906-07, 1909, fig. 4; C. H. I. vol. I, p. 616.

7 Neumann, E. : The Great Mother, plate 12b.

8 Keith, A. B. : The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads, 1925, p. 68, note 5.

9 Coomaraswamy, A. K. : The History of Indian and Indonesian Art, 1927, p. 10.

10 Dasgupta, C. C. : Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture, p. 136, note 1.

Archaeological excavations carried out at several sites in the Mithilā region have yielded a large number of terracotta object-figurines, seals and sealings and ring-stones. A number of them is connected with the Mother Goddess worship. A winged female figure, standing on lotus, is depicted on a terracotta plaque discovered from Basārh.[11] This plaque belongs to the 3rd century B. C. Though it is difficult to explain the wings, it is certain that the figure is religious in character and we may find in it the earliest example of goddess Lakṣmī due to lotus depicted as pedestal.[12] Krishna Deva[13] also pointed out that the Mother Goddess was normally represented at Vaiśālī by archaic figures, two of such figures came from stratified deposits assigned to Period II (c. 150 B.C.-100 A.D.). A draped goddess holding a very long stalk of lotus has been depicted on a sealing (no. 779 and 442) from Vaiśālī.[14] All these show that Vaiśālī maintained a continued tradition of Mother Goddess worship, which goes to prove its prevalence in Mithilā as a whole.

The worship of folk goddesses, e.g. the Yakṣiṇīs was also very common in Mithilā. Mahājanaka Jātaka[15] connects the daughter of gods named Maṇimekhalā with Mithilā. She was appointed as the guardian of the sea and she was to see that no person possessing such virtues as reverence to mothers fall into the sea. This reference to the reverence for mothers definitely suggests the practice of Mother Goddess worship. On an inscribed fragment of a Kuṣāṇa railing with a figure of Yakṣī (resembling those of Mathura school) was found at Hajipur,[16] and it certainly goes to prove the prevalence of mother cult in Mithilā.

11 ASI-AR, 1913-14, 1917—pl. xliv-i-Basārh is in the Hajipur District of Bihar, old Vaiśālī.

12 Dr. J. N. Banerjea also remarks that Laksmi very appropriately comes across several times in the sealings dug up at Basārh and Bhita (the Development of Hindu Iconography, p. 193).

13 Krishan Deva : Vaisali Excavations, 1950, p. 50.

14 ASI-AR. 1913-14, pl. xlviii and pl. L.

15 Cowell, E. B. : The Jatakas, pp. 19-37.

16 Patil, D. R. : The Antiquarian remaims of Bihar, p. 158. It came from a small ruined temple at Jharua within the municipal limits of Hajipur town. It was found by Mr. Pandey in 1918- 919.

The ring stone of steatite discovered from Vaiśālī belonging to the strata assigned to 150 B.C.-100 A.D. deserves mention. It has a honey-suckle motif, pīpala tree, winged lions and two attractive female figures carved on it. These female figures are usual Mother Goddesses.[17] Agrawala suggests its close resemblance with the figure on the gold plaque from Lauriya Nandangarh.

From Vaiśālī few examples of the figure of the goddess is associated with lotus, either standing on lotus or holding long stalk of lotus, thus giving an indication of its connection with the conception of Lakṣmī. The Gajalakṣmī or Māyā being bathed by two elephants was a favourite subject in the early Buddhist art and here at Vaiśālī this conception of Gajalakṣmī is only achieved in the 4th–5th century A.D. A large officiat seal (no. 200) from Vaiśālī depicts Lakṣmī standing on a low pedestal facing two customary elephants above pouring water over her from jars held in trunks.[18] This shows that during the Gupta period the worship of the principle of Śakti was fully established.

The archaeological evidence, therefore, clearly shows that in Mithilā Mother Goddess cult was predominant and was a popular form of religion. Brahmanism no doubt penetrated into Mithilā quite early but the attachment of the people of this region with Mother Cult could not be pushed in to oblivion. Naturally, in Mithilā Śakti worship was equally popular, besides Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, and the Maithilas, as a whole, were strongest supporters of Varṇāśrama Dharma, Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu being the main inspirers of the Maithilas in the realm of religion. Though Hinduism emerged stronger holding the importance of the concept of Trinity (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa), we note a gradual change in it, as Brahmā was neglected and in its place came Śakti and thereby a gradual harmonisation of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaktism was established.[19] "This new type of trinitarianism

17 Agrawala, V. S., Indian Art, p. 80.
18 ASI-AR, 1913-14, p. 134.
19 Choudhary, R. K. : Mithila in the Age of Vidyapati, p. 302.

in Mithilā was due to the influence of Tāntric belief and practices" observes R. K. Choudhary.[20]

Further, we find that the Maithilas are essentially worshippers of Śakti as the first verse taught to a Maithila child at the beginning of his educational career is in praise of Śakti.[21] The Sabara rites of the women of Mithilā, the non-vegetarian character of her people, the predominance of Tāntric belief in the region, the prevalence of Mātṛkāpūjā almost in every house and the importance attached to the Gosaunighara–all these show that the religious belief of the Maithilas was greatly influenced by the Śakti.[22]

The prevalence of the Mother Goddess cult immensely helped in the growth of Tāntric cult which further moulded the life of the Maithilas. We have ample evidence to show that Tāntricism was very popular in Mithilā. Its influence was so much so that even the names of the people used to be associated with Tantra and Śakti. J. K. Mishra refers to the names of Maithilas like Tantradhārī, Tantranātha, Śaktinātha, Khadgadhārī, Tārācaraṇa, Ādyācaraṇa etc.[23] The characteristic head-dress of the Maithilas called 'Pāga' has a Tāntric origin. Moreover, red coloured dress is very favourite with the Maithilas. The script of Maithili called Mithilākṣara or Trihutā has developed in accordance with Tāntric Yantras, the details of which has been given in Kāmadhenu Tantra and Varṇoddhāra Tantra.[24] Further, the Aripana closely associated with the Tāntric Cakra, besides feeding of kumāris, predominance of Vijayādaśamī ceremony and its association with Sādhanā, all give the same impression that Śakti worship in Mithilā was predominant.[25]

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20 Mithilā in the age of Vidyāpati.

21 साते भवतु सुप्रीता देवी शिखरवासिनी ।
उग्रेण तपसालब्धो यया पशुपतिः पतिः ॥
Cf. Ganganath Jha : Kavirahasya, p. 10; for details Cf. Mithilāṅka of Mithilā Mihira for various details about the daily life of the people of Mithilā; Sasinatha Chowdhary : Mithiladarśana; also Cf. Chanda, R. P. : Indo Aryan Races, p. 153 fn.

22 Choudhary, R. K., op. cit, p. 304.

23 Mishra, J. K. : op. cit., p. 21.

24 Ibid.

25 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., pp. 311-12.

To trace the origin of Tāntricism in Mithilā we may show that Tāntric culture penetrated into the life of Maithilas since the days of Maṇḍana Miśra, if not earlier. Vācaspati Miśra, in his commentary on the Patañjali-Darśana, has recommended the Dhyāna as prescribed in the Tantras. Various books on the methods and procedure of the Tantric worship were written in Mithilā. Thus Mithilā also contributed towards the development of Tāntric literature and scholars like Devāditya, Vardhamāna, Maṇḍana Upādhyāya, and Gaṅgānātha are believed to have written on Tāntric philosophy. Gaṅgeśa is believed to have been an accomplished Tāntric. Devanātha wrote Mantra-Kaumudī and Tantra-Kaumudī and these two works deal with the details of Tāntra worship. Vidyāpati is taken to be the author of Āgamādvaita-nirṇaya. Tārābhaktisudhārṇava of Narasimha deals with the worship not only of Tārā but of other forms of Śakti as well. In some other manuscripts this work is also known as Kālībhaktasudhārṇava. Gadādhara wrote Tantra-dīpa. Cūḍāmaṇi commposed Sādhakamaṇḍana[26] and Śrīśanātha wrote Bhavānībhaktimodikā. These two works belong to the leftist form of worship (Vīrācāra and Kulācāra). This shows that in Mithilā Tāntricism was very popular rather it was strengthened as a number of works on Tāntric literature was written by Maithila scholars. True to this fact there is a tradition according to which Tantras originated in Gauḍa, developed in Mithilā, practised in Maharashtra and decayed in Gurjara country.[27]

In Mithilā two prominent sects of the Tāntric cult were prevalent—Dakṣinācāra and Vāmācāra. While one was philosophical and devotional the other was revolting. Cakrapūjā is observed by the Vāmācārins, in which the votaries of both the sexes gather round a Cakra or circle and indulge in mass promiscuousness. Naraśimha Thakur, a Maithila Tāntric writer has given the details of this rite in his work entitled Tārābhaktisudhārṇava. In chapter VI

26 It quotes two verses from Tārāpradīpa defining the scope of the Vedas, Purāṇas and the Tantras. The Tantras are meant for the Kali age and for low class people or Śūdras (अशुद्ध शूद्रकर्माणो ये नराः कलिसम्भव)

27 गौडे प्रकाशिता विद्या मैथिलैः प्रबलीकृता ।
क्वचित क्वचिन्महाराष्ट्रे गुर्जरे प्रलयं गता ॥
Quoted by R. P. Chanda in his 'Indo Aryan Races,' p. 153 f. n.

of this work, types of women[28] required for this pūjā are enumerated and in Chapter IV a detailed description of the horrible "Birasādhana" practices, also known as Citāsādhana has been given. The Dakṣinācārins disown these horrible practices. R. K. Choudhary has analysed the available references and comes to the conclusion that Tāntricism exercised a very potent influence on the development of Maithili culture.[29] According to the Tāntric belief gods descend to take their seats on these diagrams,[30] which also represent the female organs. The Yantras are complex diagrams and some of the Aripanas and Kohabar paintings are intimately connected with the fertility organs and agricultural products.[31] The Pañcamakāras are pleasing to gods is mentioned in the Tāntric texts. Caṇḍeśvara[32] on the authority of Devīpurāṇa has tried to show that if one does not talk or behave indecently, he incurs the wrath of the Goddess. Sexual indulgence is one of the five Pañcamakāras. In the Kālikāpurāṇa (61- 21-22) also sexual indulgence has been referred to. Several other works like the Gandharvatantra, Kāmākhyātantra, Mahācinācāracakram, Nirvāṇatantra etc. prescribe sexual connections as part of the ceremony.[33]

The worship of Śakti, therefore, brought in its train different forms of Tāntric worship. Vidyāpati, the famous poet of Mithilā, has thrown sufficient light on the importance of Śakti worship in his Durgābhaktitaraṅgiṇī. Though he was a devotee of Śiva but he was equally attached to Śakti. In Mithilā in the age of Vidyāpati the triad of Smārta Brāhmaṇical Hinduism (Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu) was accepted by all sections of the people.[34] Jyotirīśvara, a four-

28 Naṭis, Kāpālikas, Veśyas, Dhobins, Nāpita, Brāhmaṇa, Śūdra, Goālin and Malini are names—This description, from a Maithila writer of repute, enables us to arrive at the conclusion that Tāntricism, or at least a type of it, had been ultimately associated with those castes and professions that were despised for many centuries; for other castes cf. Dasgupta, S. B., Obscure Religious Sects, pt. 1; cf. pp. 62–63.

29 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., p. 313.

30 Vasu, N. N. : Viśvakośa (Bengali) xv. 545.

31 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., p. 313.

32 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 362.

33 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., p. 313; Kṛtyaratnākara, 362.

34 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., p. 308.

teenth century Maithila writer has also thrown light on Śakti worship. In his Varṇaratnākara (seventh kallola) describes the cemetry and the burning ground and mentions therein eight kinds of Śaktis, besides eight kinds of Bhairava.[35] This testifies to the Mātṛkā Pūjā being prevalent in Mithilā. In the gambling section he mentions that the gambling house was to be situated near the temple of Devī.[36] He mentions Niśumbha-maṇḍanā under Nṛtya-varṇanā (58 ka). He has also given the list of sixty-four Yoginis.[37] Dr. Lakshman Jha has pointed out that Jyotirīśvara in his Varṇaratnākara mentioned Devībhāgavat among the Purāṇa or Mahāpurāṇa as Devīpurāṇa and he appears to have placed Devībhāgavata over the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, as Bhāgavata had been enlisted there under Upapurāṇas.[38] Dr. Jha, further, deduces that Jyotirīśvara himself was a Śākta, though in Mithilā the same person could be a Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava at the same time.[39] The high place given to Devībhāgavata by Jyotirīśvara is a clear proof of the importance of Śakti-worship in Mithilā in the fourteenth century A. D. However, in course of time the place of Devībhāgavata was taken up by the Durgāsaptaśatī of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.

The predominance of Śakti-worship in Mithilā combined with Tāntricism had its influence on other religious sects also. The Pañcarātra system of the Vaiṣṇavas was also popular in Mithilā. R. P. Chanda has tried to show that there was some connection between the Pañcarātra system and the various kinds of Tantra.[40] In the Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā story, Rādhā was regarded as the Śakti.[41] Umāpati pays obeisance to Bhavānī, Hari and Śiva (the triad of the

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35 Varṇaratnākara, ed. Sunitikumar Chatterjee, p. XXX.

36 Ibid., p. XXXI.

37 Ibid., p. 52—Kaumārī, Chāmuṇḍā, Kālikā. Kāmākṣā, Raktanetrī, Triśaktitārā, Vajratārā, Ugratārā, Jhaṅkārinī, Huṅkārinī, Nirañjanā, Mahāmāyā, Putanā, Bhuruṇḍā, Kurukullā, etc.

38 JBRS, vol. XXXVII. pt. 1-2, p. 123.

39 Ibid., p. 153.

40 Chanda, R. P. : Indo-Aryan Races, 90ff.

41 R. K. Choudhary refers to the Belva inscription of Bhojavarman which refers to Kṛṣṇa as sporting with hundreds of Gopīs and the association of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa a redeeming feature in this story (op. cit., p. 318).

Smārta Brāhmaṇical Hinduism). Similarly, Caṇḍeśvara in his Kṛtyaratnākara (verses 1. 2) pays tributes to Gaurī and Śaṅkarī at the same time to the fish and tortoise incarnations of Viṣṇu. In his Pūjāratnākara, he discusses the Tāntric rules regarding Śiva, Durgā, Viṣṇu and Sūrya.[42] Jyotirīśvara offered salutations to Śiva, Viṣṇu, Rādhā, Hari, Kṛṣṇa and others, while Vidyāpati believed in the unity of Godhead and conceived of Śakti behind Nārāyaṇa as nourisher and sustainer.[43] Dr. S. Chattopādhyāya refers to the story of Yogamāyā in the Viṣṇupurāṇa which shows that the followers of the Bhāgavata sect were gradually making alliance with the Tāntric mother cult.[44] There is erotic tendencies in Sahajiyā and Nātha cults and both Jyotirīśvara and Vidyāpati refer to the Nātha cult.[45]

Mithilā was considered to be one of the important Śāktapīṭhas of India and a number of sites[46] are connected with Tāntric cults. A passage from Rudrayāmala quoted in the Kulārṇava Tantra actually speaks of eighteen pīṭhas among which Mithilā is one.[47] In the Pīṭhanirṇaya goddess Mahāmāyā is associated with Nepala, Gaṇḍakī and Caṇḍī with Gaṇḍakī, and Umā and Mahādevī with Mithilā.[48] In the Śivacharita which closely follows Pīṭhanirṇaya with a little variation[49] we find only Mahādevī associated with Mithilā, Mahāmāyā and Navadurgā with Nepal and Amari with Tirhutā (or Tīrabhukti). R. K. Choudhary observes : "The very appearance of some of the important Śāktapīṭhas of Mithilā would convince even a lay man that they were formerly the centres of Buddhist esoteric cults later converted into the Śāktapīṭhas–the Jaya-

42 Choudhary, R. K. : op. cit., p. 318

43 Ibid.

44 Chattopadhyaya, S. : The Evolution of Theistic Sects in Ancient India, p. 153.

45 Cf. Gorakṣavijaya nāṭaka of Vidyāpati.

46 Ugratārāsthāna at Mahisi (Saharsa), Kātyāyanīsthāna, Jayamaṅgalā (Begusarai Dist.), Uchchaiṭha (Madhubani Dist.), Janakpur (in Nepal Terai), Cāmuṇḍāsthāna (Muzaffarpur).

47 Sircar, D. C. : The Śāktapīṭhas, p. 18.

48 Ibid., p. 35.

49 Ibid., p. 40.

maṅgalāsthāna, Ugratārā temple and the Kātyāyanisthāna may be cited as examples in this connection."[50]

A reference to the practice of drawing aripans may here be made, in which instead of brushes, only the nimble finger is used. The outer form of it are often symbolical of the Tāntric design, and some inner features are related to the Śākta creed.[51] The patterns of these aripanas are generally representing natural phenomena and different other objects including triangle connected with Gaurī.[52] R. K. Choudhary observes, "The geometrical shapes, mainly triangular and circular, are often used in aripanas for certain kinds of worship such as Tusaripūjā for unmarried girls, Pṛthivīpūjā etc."[53] He further informs that in ṣaṣṭhī pūjā aripana is used and the Kojagaraka aripana is meant to welcome Lakṣmī.[54] We may here presume that in the origin of these aripanas tāntric elements played a vital role.

In Mithilā, which had a long tradition of Śakti worship, a number of folk goddesses were also worshipped. Goddess Manasā was widely worshipped in this region, no doubt, her worship was prevalent in the entire eastern India. She is essentially a snake goddess but at the same time a powerful mother goddess. In the month of Śrāvaṇa, the people gather together in a place of their choice at night and a few of them tell the story of Lakhinder and Behulā with singing and dancing. The famous poet of Mithilā, Vidyāpati, composed in Sanskṛit a work entitred "Vyādi Bhakti Taraṅgiṇī", a treatise on Manasā worship. The story of this text differs in few points in broad outline, it corresponds to that current in Bengal and so Basu observes : "It may be that the popular story current here (Bengal) was adopted by the people of Mithila as a local tradition was found or the same story was prevalent in Mithilā from older days. Whatever might have been the case it seems possible that the writer worked upon what he got in his own society."[55] The story of Manasā

50 Choudhary, R. K., op. cit., p. 311.

51 Ibid., p. 368.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

55 New Indian Antiquary, vol. III, nos. 344. 1944, pp. 49-57.

is given in the Prakṛtikhaṇḍa of Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (adhyāyas 45, 46) and Devībhāgavata Purāṇa, (ninth chapter, adhyāyas 47, 38ff; 48, 145).[56] The story depicted in the Mānasavijaya (of Vipradāsa ed. by Sukumara Sena, ASB-1953, Calcutta) of Bengal either showing struggle between the devotees of Śiva and those of Manasā or Caṇḍī derives not from the rivalry between the philosophy of Śaivism and Śāktism, but from a clash between the farming people and semi-nomadic tribes, who had encroached on cultural land, a clash which naturally involved the deities they worshipped.[57] According to Dasgupta it represented the struggle of decaying Śaivism against the growth and spread of Śāktism.[58] Dasgupta's view appears to be more logical since Mithilā had a long tradition of Mother Goddess cult, there might have been struggle betveen Śākti m and Śaivism in the remote past in which Śāktism came out victorious. The impact of Śakti worship on the life of Maithilas is quite apparent.

In connection with the Manasāpūjā a few facts require examination. We find that the story of Lakhinder and Behulā is attached with the worship of Manasā. There is a great controversy among the scholars with regard to the identification of the birth place of Chāndo, the legendary hero of the story connected with the Manasā-worship.[59] Some scholars believe that the birth place of Chāndo, Champakanagar, was in the district of Burdwan (Bengal). Others like Basant Ranjan Ray, D. C. Sen, A. Bhattacharya etc., champion the claim of Bihar. It would not be unfair to believe that Chāndo lived in Champa or Champakanagar in the district of Bhagalpur (Bihar) and that Ujāni, the birth place of Behulā was nearby.[60] Local tradition also support

56 Since the goddes came out of the mind of Kaśyapa while he was in meditation she is called Manasā. She was married to Jaratkāru and he had a son named Āstika. In the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa we find the conflict between Dhanavantari and Manasā mentioned.

57 Choudhary, R. K.: op. cit., p. 305.

58 Dasgupta, S. B.: Obscure Religious Cults, Intro., p. XXXI.

59 For details on controversy see, P. K. Maity's 'Historical Studies in the cult of Manasā', p. 129ff.

60 Ibid., also see Nikhilanath Ray, 'Mursidādāder Itihās', p. 87; D. C. Sen, Vaṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, pt. I, p. 172; Manasāmaṅgal, ed. Basant Ranjan Ray, Intro., pp. 4f.

it. People also point out to the supposed chamber in the village Ujāni, close to the site of Champā; and a fair is also held in honour of Behulā in the month of Śrāvaṇa near Nāthanagar. Moreover, such fairs are very common all over the Mithilā region. At Birhana[61] in the Muzaffarpur district, during the rains, on Nāgapañcamī, a melā is held to commemorate the worship of snakes. Similar fairs are noticeable at a number of places.[62] It appears that Bengal and Bihar both has been the centres of Manasāpūjā, whether Chāndo belonged to Aṅga (Bhagalpur) or originally he belonged to Champā (Bhagalpur) and later on migrated to Raṅgāmaṭi in the Murshidabad district,[63] is a different question. The popularity of the story and the worship of Manasā is our main concern. The worship of Manasā was definitely popular in Mithilā and so the story of Lakhinder and Behulā also became popular in this region. It became the popular devotional songs of Mithilā. Its devotional and emotional character could not fail in inspiring the great Maithila poet Vidyāpati who composed 'Vyādi Bhakti Taranginī' on this theme.

The Maithilas held rivers in great reverence and worshipped many important rivers of the land as goddesses. Mithilā has been a land of rivers and the rivers played a great role in socio-economic system of the land, their deification, therefore, was quite natural. The great river of northern India, Gaṅgā is held as a great goddess and her images are also found. The tradition of Gaṅgā-worship is also noticeable in the life of Maithilas. Caṇḍeśvara informs that on the seventh day of the bright half of Vaiśākha Gaṅgā was worshipped.[64] The worship of Gaṅgā occupies an important place in the life of Hindus, particularly in the life of the Maithilas. The story of the love for Gaṅgā of the famous Maithila poet Vidyāpati is very popular in Mithilā.

61 Muzaflarpur District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Roychoudhary, 1958, p. 241.

92 R. K. Choudhary informs that snake worship was widely prevalent in Mithilā and different version of the Behulā songs in Mithilā go to show that the tradition is very old. The Nāya Pañcamī is also observed with due serenity throughout the country, but in Mithilā, it has got special significance (Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati, p. 3o7).

63 Ray, N. R.: Murshidābāder Itihās, p. 87—This tradition is recorded.

64 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 159

Another river of this land is Kośī which influences the life of the people of Saharsa and Purnea districts. There she is generally known as Kośīmāī i.e. mother-hood is attached to the river goddess.[65] Kamalā is another river goddess, representing river Kamalā, also taken to be the goddess of fish and therefore much enthusiastically worshipped by the Mallahas (fishermen). The background to this pūjā is provided by the song of Kamalā (Kamalā kā gīta) which narrates her brave exploits and divine deeds.

Caṇḍeśvara in his Kṛtyaratnākara gives the list of festivals[66] elebrated in Mithilā in different months. Many festivals we find connected with the worship of goddess. The eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Caitra was held in the honour of Rukmini.[67] The worship of Rukmini, the wife of Kṛṣṇa, suggests the principle of Śakti held its predominance in Mithilā. It also shows that the family members of Kṛṣṇa was worshipped, which was due to the popularity of the Pañcarātra school of Vaiṣṇavism. On the twelfth day (Madana-dvādaśī) Kāmadeva was worshipped and which continued on the following two days of the bright half.[68] This function was very popular as it was known as Madana or Kāma Mahotsava.[69] Kāma is a god of love and his worship attaches importance to the sensuous aspect of religion, usually a special feature of the Vāmācārin Tāntric form of worship. There is no denying the fact that Mithilā had been a seat of Tāntric religion, particularly of the Vāmācāra faction. In the month of Jyeṣṭha, on the fourth day of the bright half, the birth day of goddess Umā was celebrated with great pomp and splendour by all sections of women.[70] Umā is a great mother goddess. She is the spouse of Śiva and the worship of this form of Śakti is well established in this region. Śukla Devī's birth was celebrated on the eighth day.[71] She is

65 'Kośī-songs' by R. K. Choudhary in the Spark of 1954.

66 R. K. Choudhary in his book entitled 'The Mithilā in the Age of Vidyāpati' gives the list of festivals, see pp. 293-302.

67 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 128.

68 Ibid., pp. 135-36; 128.

69 Ibid., pp. 137-139; Modern Review (March 1926), pp. 282-297 for Holi festival.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

71 Ibid., p. 190. She is the goddess who killed demons.

another goddess of importance worshipped by the Maithilas at least during the age of Caṇḍeśvara.

The Vaṭasāvitrī day was celebrated on the Jyeṣṭha Purṇimā as Caṇḍeśvara informs.[72] According to him a jar filled with rice, fruits, sugarcane plant was to be provided and a copper plate was to be placed on the jar with the image of Brahmā and Sāvitrī.[73] As popularly believed this worship saved women from widowhood. It is essentially a women's function and is still a popular festival among the women not only of Mithilā but of the whole of Bihar. No doubt the story of Sāvitrī and Satyavān is associated with this festival. Whatever be the Paurāṇic references, there is no doubt that Sāvitrī is attached with Brahmā and in this worship of Brahmā and Sāvitrī together we may find idea of the worship of Brahmā, the creator, and his spouse Sāvitrī (who is also his daughter).

The worship of Durgā is very popular in Mithilā since centuries. The Kūrma Purāṇa (1. 21. 19. 20) mentions worship of Durgā by king Janaka of Mithilā.[74] It is celebrated with all pomp and show all over Mithilā. Caṇḍeśvara has also given the details of the worship of this goddess. Usually Durgā-pūjā is celebrated in the month of Āświn. Caṇḍeśvara has also mentioned a number of forms of Devī to be worshipped on different dates. A golden image of Durgā was worshipped on the ninth day of Āṣāḍha, and unmarried girls and the Brāhmaṇas besides others were offered food.[75] The association of unmarried girls is of special significance from our point of view. This gives us the impression that Tāntricism had a great impact on the religious belief of the Maithilas. Besides Āṣāḍha in the month of Bhādra, on the ninth day of the dark half, Durgā image was taken into procession as

72 Ibid, pp. 187-88.

73 Ibid., p. 195.

74 Kumar, Dr. Pushpendra : Śakti cult in Ancient India, p. 28. Dr. Kumar also refers to the tradition thak Rāmachandra of Ayodhyā was the first tocelebrate the autumnal worship of the goddess. But he futher informs that no clue to this tradtion can be traced in the present Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.

75 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 195.

Caṇḍeśvera informs.[76] He, further, informs that on the ninth day of the bright half of this month also Durgā was worshipped along with Janāradana, Gaṇeśa, Varuṇa and Vanaspati with wheat.[77] The worship of Vaiṣṇavī was also celebrated on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Āśvin.[78] Caṇḍeśvara recommends the holding of car festival of Durgā on the ninth day of Āśvin.[79] This festival is also known as Navamīrathavratam.[80] Satī[81] was worshipped on the fourth day of the bright day and Bhadrakālī[82] on the eighth day. Bhadrakālī was created to destroy the sacrifice of Dakṣa. From seventh day to the tenth day of the bright half of the month Durgā-worship was celebrated. Still Durgā Pūjā is held throughout Bihar and particularly in Mithilā during this period. Besides, the worship of Lakṣmī (on the Kārtika amāvaśyā) on the day on which Dīpāvalī is celebrated, Gaurī was worshipped on the third day of Agrahaṇya and Sītā on the eighth day of the dark half of Phālguna.

On examination of the above list of festivals we find that throughout the year one or the other goddess was worshipped. The goddess connected with these festivals are, Rukmini, Umā Sāvitrī, Śukla Devī, Durgā with Gaṇeśa, Varuṇa and Vanaspati, Bhadrakālī, Vaiṣṇavī, Lakṣmī, Gaurī, Sītā etc. Among all these Durgā's worship on different dates has been mentioned. Rukmini's worship gives an idea of the Pañcarātra of Vaiṣṇavism and Vaiṣṇavī is also connected with Vaiṣṇavism. Gaurī and Bhadrakālī are also associated with Śiva as they are his śaktis.

The ancient remains of monuments and sculptures discovered from Mithilā do testify to the fact that Śakti worship was widely prevalent here. Several places many be connected with it and which might have been important centres of Śakti-worship. Uchaiṭha[83] is an important centre of Śakti-worship.

76 Kṛtyaratnākara, pp. 259-64.
77 Ibid., pp. 285-86.
78 Ibid., pp. 309-310.
79 Ibid., pp. 314-315.
80 Choudhary, R. K., op. cit., p. 298.
81 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 348.
82 Ibid., p. 350.
83 Darbhanga District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Roychoudhary, 1964, p. 755.

It is situated 32 miles north of Darbhanga and at this place on the bank of a tank a temple is situated. The temple enshrines a four-armed goddess. Her Vāhana lion suggests that the image is of Siṁhavāhinī Durgā but her head is missing. A lotus flower can be seen on the back of the lion. Besides, the principal image some small images have also been found and many others have been discovered from the tank. The images belonged to the Pāla-Sena period and they are sculptured out of blackstone. This place appears to have been a very important centre of Śakti-worship during the Pāle-Sena period. The discovery of several sculptures from this place is a clear cut proof, nodoubt, that the remains of the present temple is a recent structure. It is interesting to note that this place is associated with the famous poet Kālidāsa according to local tradition. Kālidāsa is said to have worshipped the goddess here and her blessings made him a great poet. Whatever be the truth behind such a tradition it is a certainty that people from far distant place come here to worship and offer scrifices. An image of Durgā is in worship at the village Khojpur (Darbhanga), which on the basis of an inscription on its pedestal, is dated in 1253-54 A.D. by D.C. Sircar.[84] Among other monuments mention may be made of a Girijā Temple situated in the village of Phulpur in Madhubani district (4 miles south of Haralakhī).[85] Though Girijā alludes to Pārvatī but possibly the temple is connected with the worship of Sītā, wife of Lord Rāma. Caṇḍeśvara also informs about the celebration of the anniversary of Sītā.[86] Ahilyāsthāna[87] (in Ahiari village two miles south of Kamtaul Rly. station) in Darbhanga district is also an important centre of śakti-worship and people from all part of Mithilā come to worship at this place. The present temple contains the footprints of Sītā, as main object of worship.[88]

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84 JBRS, XXXVII, pt. 3-4, pp. 10-13.

85 Darbhanga District Gazetteer, p. 757.

86 Kṛtyaratnākara, p. 518,

87 The place is named after the legendary wife of sage Gautama who was turned into stone by a curse and her coming to life could become possible by the touch of the feet of Rāmachandra.

88 Patil, D. R. : The Antiquarian Remains in Bihar, p. 2; The present temple was built in 1817 by Maharaja Chhatra Singh Bahadur of Darbhanga.

At Imadpur[89] 12 miles north-east of Hajipur, from an extensive mound a large number of sculptures were discovered. A large group of three bronze figures of Balarāma, Subhadrā, and Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva has been discovered from here. The discovery of this group of images clearly proves the prevalence of Pāñcarātra form of Vaiṣṇavism which was definitely influenced by Tāntricism. Garrick identified another group of bronze figures with Nārāyaṇa, Lakshmī and Sarasvatī.[90] The images of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī testifies to the worship of these goddesses in this region. In still another group three Mātṛkās along with Gaṇeśa and Vīrabhadra have been represented,[91] which show that the worship of the Mātṛkās was also in practice at this place. The association of Hajipur area with the old mother-goddess is proved by the Vaiśālī excavations, moreover, from a small ruined temple at Jharua (situated in Hajipur towu) a Kuṣāṇa railing with a figure of Yakṣiṇī has been discovered.[92] The worship of goddess Tārā was prevalent at Vaiśālī is referred to by the Tibetan traveller Dharmaśvāmī and who also informs that the image worship in the Buddhist shrines was similar to the Hindu shrines.[93]

At Birpur[94] in the Begusarai district (3 miles from Tilrath Rly. station) the images of goddesses have been found in excellent condition, including of Kālī and Navadurgā and all of them are now worshipped by the villagers. Another important center of Śakti worship may be identified with Jayamaṅgalā-garh.[95] Devī Jayamaṅgalā or Durgā is worshipped here. Jayamaṅgalā is another name of Durgā or Bhavānī, a painted figure of whom may be seen in the

89 Ibid., p. 172.
90 Ibid., p. 172.
91 Ibid., p. 172.
92 Ibid., p. 158.
93 Choudhary, R. K., op. cit., p. 305.
94 Monghyr District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Roychoudhary, 1960, p. 463.
95 Ibid., p. 483. The island in the Tāla which is sacred spot was kept revenue free during permanent settlement and government made yearly grant of expenses for feeding monkeys and keeping a lamp which burnt day and night in the temple, this grant continued from 1793-1852.

niche. The structure of the temple is also believed to be ancient. The place still holds its importance in the region and devotees from far distant places gather to pay homage to the goddess. Another important centre in the district may be identified with Sanghoul[96] from where the broken figures of goddesses have been found in black stone. The identity of these images is difficult to establish. They may be Apsaras, but there is more probability of their being either the representations of the Mātṛkās or different forms of Durgā, since in the near vicinity we find Kālī, Nava-durgā and Jayamaṅgalā were worshipped. Buchanan also noticed a collection of images at this place underneath a tree on the mounds, and he identified one of them representing the female figure destroying the man and buffalo,[100] naturally the figure in question should be taken as the representation of the Great Goddess Durgā-Mahiṣamardinī. Hence in the 9th-10th centuries this region must have been a strong centre of Śakti-worship.

The impact of Śakti-worship was no less felt in the district of Saharsa. Rather, Tāntricism made its headway in this district quite early, and the cult of Tārā has been very popular here. Mahiṣī has been a very popular seat of Ugratārā worship and is looked upon with great reverence by the people of this area even today. This place is said to be associated with the great Maithila philosopher Maṇḍana Miśra and the origin of Mithilā-Tāntricism may be traced to Mahiṣī.[98] Scholars from different parts of the country flocked at the Maṭha established by Maṇḍana. Besides Maṇḍana, Vācaspati and Udayanāchārya are also associated with Saharsa district.[99] Udayanāchārya had his seat at Kariyama (in Madhepur subdivision) though another view connects him with a village of the Samastipur district. According to the local tradition it was the famous Śāktapīṭha where the eyes of Satī fell, naturally becoming an important centre of Śakti-worship. The Nīlasarasvatī

96 Monghyr District Gazetteer, 1960, p. 513.

97 Patil, D. R., op, cit., p. 528.

98 Saharsa District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Roychoudhary, 1965, p. 23; At Mahiṣī the Ugratārā temple is found and Maṇḍana Miśra was a great devotee of this later Buddhistic deity incorporated into India from Tibet through Nepal (Saharsa District Gazetteer, 1965, p. 491).

99 Ibid.

of Mahiṣī may be identified with the tāntric deity Mahānīlasarasvatī[100] of which we get a veiled reference in the Gaya inscription of Nayapāla.[101] D. C. Sircar has referred to Ugradevi and her association with Mihilā.[102]

In the district of Purnea the worship of Kālī is equally popular. In every village, we get attached to every house, even of Mohammedan, a little shrine called Khudaighar where prayers are offered before the figure of Kālī.[103] Temples of Kālī and Durgā are also found at Laxmipur and Barari respectively.[104]

The Bahuśrutriyas, one of the nine sects of the Mahāsaṅghika school of Buddhism, gave a spiritual or supra-mundane character to Buddhist teachings. They were very powerful in Mithilā, practically controlling the region from Darbhanga to Purnea—a region described by the orthodox Buddhists as heretical. The Tantra which grew from the Mahāyāna permeated the life of the Maithilas so very completely that a Tāntric initiation became as essential for them as the Vedic one, and it was in Mithilā that Buddhism was completely assimilated into Brāhmaṇism—in Tantra and the Vedānta, resulting into the conversion of the Buddhist sites inth the Tāntric pīṭhas.[105]

The traditional accounts no doubt limit the extent of Mithilā in the south to river Gaṅgā but it would not be unfair to say that Maithila culture spread even south of the Ganges and the parts of the districts of Bhagalpur and Mon-

100 Saharsa District Gazetteer, 1965, p. 23.

101 Ibid., Cf. Choudhary, R. K. : Inscriptions of Bihar, p. 74.

102 Sircar, D. C. : The Śāktapīṭhas, pp. 47 & 65; The real Ugratārā is a fearful deity with a chain of human heads on her neck and the deity is standing on a dead body. There should be, further, another small image on the forehead (Bhattacharya, B. Indian Buddhist Iconography, p. 155). The Ugratārā image at Mahiṣī is not as mentioned by Bhattacharya. It has two imagas of Ekajaṭā and Nīlasarasvatī on either side. The image at Mahiṣī appears to be of 'Khadirvani Tārā'.

103 Purnea District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Roychoudhary, 1963, p. 165.

104 Ibid., p. 777.

105 Saharsa District Gazetteer, 1965, p. 24; Almost all the important Tāntric sites of north Bihar specially Jayamaṅgalāgarh, Mahiṣī were formerly the seats of Mahāyāna Buddhists later converted into Pīṭhas.

ghyr along the Ganges were definitely influenced by it; i.e. the northern parts of these districts came under the influence of Śakti-worship. At Sringirikh,[106] one of the peaks of the Kharagpur group of hills (situated 20 miles south-west of Monghyr) a relief of a female figure in black stone (four feet high) was found. The figure is holding in her two hands two long flowers which give support to two small elephants. Smaller female figures, carved on the same block of stone, stand at the two lower corners on either side of the bigger image. These figures are probably Buddhistic but now they are worshipped by the Hindus, the bigger image as Pārvatī and the smaller ones as Gaurā and Sandhyā.[107] The principal female may, however, be either Lakṣmī or Māyā, since She is holding two long flowers supporting elephants. The Gaja-Lakṣmī conception, no doubt, differs as in this the elephants sprinkle water over the goddess and this feature is absent in the figure in question. The use of blackstone for the relief help us in dating the figures to 9th-10th centuries. The worship of Kālī (one of the consorts of Śiva) is very common in this area, and a number of temples connected with this goddess is found in the Kharagpur region.[108] At Rajoana (2 miles to the north-west of Lakhisarai Rly. station) we find antiquities of 7th and 8th centuries.[109] A bust of a female figure, (a seated goddess) attended by an umbrella bearer, and other three figures probably in supplication, have been found. Śiva has also been found depicted with attendants including a female deity with Makara. The association of the goddess with Makara make her Goddess Gaṅgā. We also find the images of Kālī and Gaṇeśa at this place. Hence we notice members of the Śiva family here depicted. The bust of the female figure attended by an umbrella bearer may be identified with the principal consort of Śiva, thus

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106 Monghyr District Gazetteer, ed. P. C. Reychoudhary, 1960, p. 519.

107 Ibid., p. 519; A temple of Sāvitrī or Sandhyā was built by Kshemakarna Ojha in 1692 A. D. at Deoghar as recorded in a Bengali inscription found on its doorway. (Patil, D. R., op. cit., p. 105).

108 Ibid., p. 374; A temple of Kālī with her image was erected in 1643 A. D. by Harinatha at Deoghar (Santhal Paragana) and which was completed in 1712 A. D. by a Jaina (Patil, D. R., op cit., p. 105).

109 Patil, D. R., op. cit., p. 428.

showing the dominance of Śakti-worship in this area. A group of Śiva-Pārvatī on Mt. Kailāśa with Bhairava standing in front has also been depicted which leave no doubt in the connection of the site with the worship of Śakti. A oollection of images, one representing the female figure destroying the man and the buffalo suggesting the image of the goddess Durgā Mahiṣamardinī was also noticed by Buchanan at Swang (10 miles west of Sheikhpura).[110] Another important monument connected with Śakti-worship is the Chaṇḍisthāna temple of Monghyr town (2 miles from the main town) built on a rock.[111] In a subterranean dark cave of the hillock with a stone on cauldron-shaped roof over which the temple stands, one eye is inscribed on the wall, which is worshipped as the representation of goddess Chaṇḍī. The local tradition associates this place with Rājā Bhartṛhari where he attained his Tāntric Siddhi.[112] The depiction of the eye and its worship definitely connects it with Tāntricism. It was definitely treated as a Śākta pīṭha though it is difficult to identify this site with any of the Śāktapīṭhas mentioned by different authorities. The Karṇa Chaurā house in the Monghyr town[113] is also connected with Devī according to the local tradition which also shows Tāntric influence. Naturally, Monghyr got a fair share of Tantric heritage is proved beyond doubt.

In the District of Bhagalpur at Kheri Hill (10 miles south-west of Bhagalpur) a large block of stone slab has been found and which is known as Vāgīśvarīsthāna.[114] This district too appears to have a long tradition of Śakti-worship. As Jahaṅgīrā,[115] close to Sultanganj, is a rocky island called by this name and where the Śiva temple called Ajgaibinātha is situated. A number of sculptures have been found here on piles of granite blocks, e.g. Hara-gaurī, Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, River goddess on her vāhana etc.[116] The

110 Patil, D. R., op. cit., p. 528.

111 Monghyr District, Gazetteer, 1960, 373.

112 Ibid.

113 Monghyr District Gazetteer, 1960, p. 373. The story of Vikrama getting 'Pāras pathar' from Devī for making gold and in pleasing the goddess, burning of himself in boiling ghee is also referred to which shows Tāntric affiliation.

114 Patil, D. R., op. cit., p. 206.

115 Ibid., p. 178.

116 Ibid.

depiction of goddess Gaṅgā is interesting. The cult of Rādhā has also been popular in the Mithilā region. The sculptures belong to 2nd-3rd century A.D. according to Cunningham and 7th or 8th century A. D. according to Bloch.[117] At Bhavantapur[118] a temple of goddess Chaṇḍī has been found, built on an ancient site of perhaps a Buddhist temple of the 11th century A. D. A colossal female figure was discovered here, besides a damaged male figure of a warrior riding a tiger (now locally called Buddhai).[119] On one of the fragments of carved door frame an inscription has been discovered which refer to the goddess Maheśvarī.[120] At Mandār[121] (30 miles south of Bhagalpur) near the stairs of the Pāpahārī Tank is lying a stone on which a very rudely carved figure of a female deity, in relievo, is called Pāpahāriṇī.[122] Buchanan refers to another mutilated image of a goddess called Jagadambā and also a damaged representation of the sacred cow or Kāma dhenu.[123] Beglar[124] noticed a large rock cut sculpture, rudely carved, representing a 'ten-armed' three headed figure (male or female, is difficult to tell from its rudeness), trampling on a squat prostrate figure and over the head in a canopy as of spreading branches of a tree. Beglar identifies it to be signifying the triumph of Brahmāviṣṇu over Buddhism—prostrate figure to be of Buddha. Col. Franklin calls it the image of Mahākālī.[125]

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117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., pp. 18-19.

119 Patil, D. R., op. cit., pp. 18-19.

120 Ibid. The female figure may be identified with this goddess. The inscription mentions one Sarba Singh Deva and the leonage of Buddhesa. One tradition connect the nuns to king Virata of Mahabharata the other mention that the fort was built by a Mughal general to fulfil a condition of marriage between him and the goddess, but due to the trick of the goddess the Mughal general could not build the fort.

121 Ibid., p. 253.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

Thus we find that the worship of Śakti in Mithilā can be traced back to 8th century B.C. or even earlier though we do not have archaeological proof to support its prevalence in the period earlier than 8th century B. C. This long tradition of Śakti-worship remains still unbroken in this land. In the Pāla-Sena period it was tainted by Tantricism. It was only due to the adherence to the people of this region to mother-cult prevalent earlier that Tāntricism was readily accepted in this land, because in Tāntricism feminine is elevated to the highest position. In spite of the fact that Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism also become popular in the late medieval period Śaktism did not lose its ground because it had entered to the very bone-marrow of the Maithilas. Even to-day Śakti is widely worshipped in Mithilā and every where temples of goddesses particularly of Durgā or Kāli can be found. A large number of such temples were built or renovated by the Maharajas of Darbhanga.

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
L. N. MISHRA COMMEMORATION VOLUME

Vols. LXIII-LX1V **1977-1978**

Chief Editor
Professor Upendra Thakur

Editor-in-Charge
Dr. K. K. Mandal



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
PATNA